



California Legislature

Joint Legislative Audit Committee

GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 10500 et al

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RICHARD ROBINSON
CHAIRMAN

May 30, 1979

Letter Report 902

Honorable Richard Alatorre, Chairman
Assembly Human Resources Committee
1116 Ninth Street, Room 5175
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Assemblyman Alatorre:

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee respectfully submits the Auditor General's letter report on child protective services and foster care programs administered by county welfare departments under the supervision of the Department of Social Services.

The auditors are Robert E. Christophel, Supervising Auditor, and Andrew P. Fusso. Support staff is Lucy Chin.

Sincerely,

RICHARD ROBINSON
Assemblyman, 72nd District
Chairman, Joint Legislative
Audit Committee

cc: The Honorable Speaker of the Assembly
The Honorable President pro Tempore of the Senate
The Honorable Members of the Senate and the
Assembly of the Legislature of California



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Office of the Auditor General

May 22, 1979

Letter Report 902

Honorable Richard Robinson
Chairman, and Members of the
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
State Capitol, Room 4158
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members:

In response to a resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee we have obtained information related to child protective services and foster care programs administered through the Department of Social Services (DSS) and county welfare departments. This review was conducted under the authority vested in the Auditor General by Section 10500 et seq., of the Government Code.

We were originally asked to conduct an examination which would have included a comprehensive analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of the foster care and child protective services delivery system. However, our evaluation was limited because we were denied access to individual case records.

Counsel for the Department of Social Services asserted that federal law and related state law prohibit examination of case records (other than of the disbursement of funds) by legislative employees. He asserted these prohibitions apply to the Office of the Auditor General. In our judgment, access to such records is necessary for any analysis aimed at determining efficiency and effectiveness of foster care and child protective services in the State.

In addition, the department is presently implementing legislative and administrative changes which should have significant impact on the effectiveness of delivery of these services (See Appendix A). The Office of the Auditor General can better evaluate these programs after these changes have been made.

Scope and Methodology

As a result of the limited access to records and an agreement with appropriate legislative committee staff, the scope of our review was narrowed to provide descriptive information to the Legislature in three areas:

- Initial effects of Proposition 13 and subsequent state legislation on county administration of foster care and child protective services
- Mechanisms utilized for coordination of services
- Twenty-four hour social service response systems for complaints of child abuse and neglect.

We gathered information through interviews and visits with DSS staff and county staff in San Francisco, Sutter, Marin, Los Angeles and San Diego Counties. We also examined relevant program and statistical data when available. We contacted supervisors of child protective services in 58 counties to obtain information on the structure of 24-hour response systems statewide.

This is an informational report and as such we neither draw conclusions nor make recommendations.

Background

The Department of Social Services supervises a number of income maintenance, social service and related programs in California at an annual cost of approximately \$3.1 billion* in federal, state and county funds in 1978-79. Below are listed the major programs providing foster care and child protective services in the State:

* Cost figures are amounts approved in the 1978-79 Governor's Budget.

- Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Boarding Homes and Institutions (AFDC-BHI)--(\$151 million)*--This program provides cash assistance to children who need 24-hour care in a foster home or institution (group home) as a result of a court order or parental consent. Federal funding is available for children removed by court order who meet certain additional requirements.
- Child Protective Services--(\$67 million)*--These social services reduce abuse, neglect or exploitation of children and include response to complaints or referrals.
- Out-of-Home Care Services--(\$40 million)*--This program provides social services for children placed or being considered for placement outside their homes, including assistance in obtaining the child's early return to a permanent family setting or stabilized long-term care.
- Community Care Licensing--This program regulates foster homes and similar community care facilities relative to health, safety and quality of care standards at a cost of \$20 million* for all such facilities.

As the preceding descriptions illustrate, the costs of state-supervised services to these children total at least \$258 million in fiscal year 1978-79. This figure does not include Social Security Income/State Supplemental Payments (SSI/SSP), licensing, county administration, probation, community agency or police costs which also are associated with service delivery. These children and their families may be receiving a variety of other services at additional cost, such as family planning, employment counseling or respite care.

Initial Effects of Proposition 13

In June of 1978, California citizens voted in favor of Proposition 13 which added Article XIII(A) to the California Constitution, limiting county property taxes. We interviewed county welfare department personnel to determine their impressions of the initial effects of Proposition 13 on services to abused and neglected children.

* Cost figures are amounts approved in the 1978-79 Governor's Budget.

Administrators reported increasing children's protective services (CPS) caseloads per worker following the passage of Proposition 13. For example, in Los Angeles County, CPS caseloads increased from an average of 67 children per worker in September 1977 to 72 in September 1978. However, we were told that the caseload increases could be attributed to increased numbers of child abuse and neglect referrals. For example, in San Francisco County, Children's Emergency Services referrals increased more than 50 percent between 1976 and 1978.

County representatives also informed us that community agencies providing services to children were affected by local funding cutbacks due to Proposition 13. Some agencies ceased operations altogether. County welfare department officials reported that reductions in available community resources have increased children's social services caseloads.

Hiring freezes also contributed to growing caseloads by limiting the number of available social workers. In San Diego County, a local proposition mandated reductions in the number of county employees.

While caseloads have increased, the levels of social workers assigned to these cases has remained stable in the counties we visited. These staffing levels have been maintained because of the State's funding of county social services costs in fiscal year 1978-79.

Although increases in children's social services caseloads were reported, the number of children placed in out-of-home care funded through Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Boarding Homes and Institutions (AFDC-BHI) has remained relatively stable, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
AFDC-BHI PLACEMENTS, BY COUNTY

	<u>7/77</u>	<u>10/77</u>	<u>1/78</u>	<u>4/78</u>	<u>7/78</u>	<u>10/78</u>	<u>1/79</u>
Statewide	26,271*	25,943	26,926*	27,245*	26,217	25,742	25,964
Los Angeles	8,859	8,787	9,423	9,488*	9,027	8,817	8,927
Marin	184	185	185	205	175	189	190
San Diego	1,861	1,882	1,889	1,925	1,917	1,875	1,807
San Francisco	1,348	1,371	1,387	1,372	1,367	1,327	1,358
Sutter	65	58	51	54	43	38	35

*Data estimated by DSS.

Note: 10/78 and 1/79 figures are preliminary data.

Source: Department of Social Services statistics.

County officials also indicated that there has been a shift in the approach to out-of-home placements. For example, Sutter County attributed the significant decrease in its placements to a greater emphasis on maintaining children within families whenever possible. San Francisco County has recently instituted a policy of refusing to place children without a court order, except in unusual circumstances.

Coordination Mechanisms

Abused and neglected children may be receiving services from a number of agencies. These agencies sometimes use coordination mechanisms to provide integrated and effective service delivery. We discussed such mechanisms with officials in each of the five counties we visited. These officials reported that services are usually informally coordinated, depending upon individual case needs. Each caseworker is responsible for coordinating all services for the children he or she supervises.

Although we did not evaluate the effectiveness of coordination and integration of services in the counties we visited, we did note the existence of written coordination agreements in two counties, such as an agreement between the county welfare department and a regional center serving developmentally disabled children.

We also found interagency committees had been formed in three counties to coordinate children's services. In Los Angeles County such a committee is the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect. Membership of this council includes representatives from welfare, probation, schools, health, police, the city attorney, the State Attorney General and community agencies. Two levels (a policy committee of higher officials and an operations committee of staff, which meets monthly) discuss issues such as funding pilot projects, current legislation and program standards.

Twenty-Four Hour Response Systems

Existing regulations (Division 30-113 of the Social Services Manual) require county welfare departments to establish procedures for in-person response to complaints of child abuse and neglect received outside normal working hours. The purpose of these regulations is to provide social service intervention in family crisis situations. DSS is currently requesting a \$5 million appropriation to implement this requirement statewide.

Most welfare departments providing 24-hour response use a system in which calls are forwarded to a worker who is on call at home. Two of the five county welfare departments we visited provide social worker response to complaints of child abuse and neglect on a 24-hour basis. A third county uses a locally funded community agency to provide such service.

However, two counties had no 24-hour response system. In these counties many social workers lived some distance from the communities they served; thus, they were unavailable for after-hours response.

In addition, our telephone survey of 58 counties found that welfare departments in 42 counties provided social service response after normal working hours. We did not evaluate the adequacy or effectiveness of these response systems. Appendix B lists various response structures used statewide.

We were not able to obtain estimates or data to reliably determine the average amount of time for a worker to respond to complaints or referrals after receiving a call. The greatest variable in such a determination is the distance between the worker and the site of the call.

Representatives from county welfare and police departments informed us that in certain potentially violent situations police may accompany social workers for greater safety of the workers. Statewide, 38 of 44 counties responding reported occasional need for such protection, as noted in Appendix B.

Officials from county welfare and police departments noted their relationships vary. Some police departments have juvenile officers or child abuse specialists trained to handle emergency calls. Statewide, 43 of 45 counties responding reported that police officers always or sometimes involve social workers in responses to after-hours calls when they are available.

Potential for Future Audit Activity

As stated previously, the Department of Social Services is now implementing significant legislative and administrative changes in foster care and child protective services programs, as described in Appendix A. Moreover, the ability of the Office of the Auditor General to analyze efficiency and effectiveness in these areas is constrained by limited access to case records. The elimination of this constraint will enable the Legislature to receive information on the performance of many state social service programs.

Respectfully submitted,



THOMAS W. HAYES
Acting Auditor General

Staff: Robert E. Christophel, Supervising Auditor
Andrew P. Fusso
Lucy Chin, Support Staff

Attachments: Written Response of the Department of Social
Services

Appendix A--Significant Legislative and
Administrative Changes the Department
of Social Services is Implementing

Appendix B--24-Hour Response Questionnaire
Telephone Survey Results

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814



May 18, 1979

Mr. Thomas W. Hayes
Acting Auditor General
925 L Street, Suite 750
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Hayes:

This is in response to your May 17 letter to Marion J. Woods requesting comments to the draft copy of the informational letter report on child protective services and foster care programs.

The only concern our Department has with respect to this report is that it seems to indicate that most county welfare departments have adequate 24-hour child protective service response systems. This is not the case,^{1/} and it would seem inappropriate to display data indicating that these systems are adequate when the data is based on telephone calls to the county welfare departments.

If you have questions concerning this comment, please call Loren Suter, Chief, Family and Children's Services Branch, at 445-3584.

Sincerely,

Sandy Klagge

SANDRA KLAGGE
Deputy Director, Legislation

^{1/} We have incorporated this comment on page 6 of this report.

SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE
CHANGES THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS IMPLEMENTING

Below are listed recent significant legislative and administrative changes in DSS programs.

- Reorganization--SB363 (Chapter 1252, Statutes of 1977) This statute reorganized the Health and Welfare Agency and consolidated state responsibility for administration of foster care and child protective services within the Department of Social Services.
- Demonstration Projects--SB 30 (Chapter 977, Statutes of 1976 and Chapter 21, Statutes of 1977) This statute established projects in two counties aimed at reducing costs and encouraging permanent placement of children through family unification services and changes in juvenile court law. This legislation also required an annual statewide survey of foster care and evaluation of the projects yearly through 1981. DSS released the second annual survey, entitled the "Family Protection Act Report" in January of 1979.

- Social Services Planning--AB 1642 (Chapter 1235, Statutes of 1978) This statute requires DSS to design a comprehensive state and county planning system for Title XX social services (including child protective services). In addition, a task force formed by the director is charged with developing operational goals and objectives, priorities, services standards and outcome objectives.

- AFDC-BHI Program Development Bureau--This newly formed unit within DSS plans to revise regulations covering payment and eligibility for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children--Boarding Homes and Institutions program. It has also applied for a federal grant to develop a uniform system for quality control.

24-HOUR RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

1. Which of the following describes the response available in your county to complaints of child abuse and neglect received outside of normal working hours?	(N=58)*
A. Welfare Department staff on duty (defined as workers physically present at county offices available to respond in person)	0
B. Welfare Department staff on call (workers who can be contacted by phone or beeper available to respond in person)	42
C. Community workers (Response by nonpublic community agencies)	5
D. Police child abuse unit (Police specialists in dealing with child abuse--one or more P.D. in county)	7
E. Patrol officers (Situation where patrol officers have primary responsibility for response and no other specialized resources are ordinarily utilized)	11
2. If 1-A, B or C is checked:	
How often do workers request police protection when responding after hours?	(N=44)
Always	4
Sometimes, if fearful	34
Never	6
How often do police request social worker advice or response when responding after hours?	(N=45)
Always	2
Always, in some types of situations	16
Sometimes	25
Never	2

* Response totals greater than N (total number of responses) because of multiple responses from some counties.

Are responding workers bilingual, when appropriate?	(N=44)
Always	11
Sometimes	21
Never	12
3. Is there an after-hours "hot line" phone number in the county?	(N=58)*
Yes, answered by county social workers	2
Yes, answered by answering service or operators	16
Yes, answered by a community agency or police	8
No	33

* Response totals greater than N (total number of responses) because of multiple responses from some counties.